

Work Camp Project a Success

By VINCENT THOMAS
Assemblyman, 68th District
One solution for the school dropout-problem seems to be passing its first test with some success. This opinion of the results achieved by the state's first experimental work camp for youth was joined in by a number of state officials who testified before a recent meeting of the Senate Fact Finding Committee on Governmental Efficiency.

They recommended to the committee that the pilot camp, which has been operated by the Division of Forestry in Riverside County



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since November, 1963, be supplemented by a second camp in the northern part of the state, perhaps Monterey County. The Department of Conservation was joined by the Department of Education and the Youth Authority in this suggestion.

The Riverside camp has a maximum capacity of 100 youths. It offers the enrollees school courses, vocational training and work in the several branches of forest management. The State Forester emphasized that the camp is not a correctional institution for juvenile delinquents. The youngsters are high school dropouts, or even graduates who have not been able to find other jobs.

ENROLLEES are selected by the State Employment Service from volunteers between the ages of 17 and 22. They are required to sign up for a six month period, and are given their transportation, food and clothing. They are paid \$60 per month by the state, of which \$40 is withheld until they leave the camp.

Administrators of the program told the committee that about two-thirds of the youths are drop-outs who have a poor attitude toward discipline and work when they reach the camp. Gradually, however, they learn to work in the forestry programs, and seek remedial schooling of vocational training. Learning how to do a day's work under discipline is regarded as the most important result of the program.

Statistically, the results so far look really encouraging. Through the middle of September, a total of 312 boys had entered the camp. Of these, 81 were still in camp, 62 had completed their six month sign up, and 169 had left camp before completion of their periods. The comparatively high rate of "graduation" during the trial months of camp — 20 per cent — is regarded as definitely reassuring.

AS ONE official put it, "these lads still have adjustment problems after 17 or more years of family and

school influence, so it's a minor miracle that our camp program of six short months has achieved any results."

One Senator asked whether camp graduates might be an additional source of farm labor when the bracero system

shuts down at the end of the year. A spokesman for the Department of Employment replied that this was doubtful.

He said that while hard work and physical fitness can be sold to a point, young people are not now attracted to farm

labor, primarily because of low pay.

Reference was made to four youth camps, to be operated under the federal end-to-pov-erty program, but it was indicated they might not be opened until late spring of

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1965. The possibility of securing federal grants for additional state camps was mentioned. It was indicated the work camp program would be kept experimental for a while longer at least.

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